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ABSTRACT

The women's movement has shown how outdated assumptions about women block their freedom to achieve and stunt their earning power, but traditional stereotypes also exact a toll from men. Boys growing up in today's society must "prove" themselves to be full-fledged males, and are discouraged from being aesthetic, sensual, and nurturing. Athletics are just one proving ground for masculinity. Messages that equate manhood with toughness and a refusal to compromise may contribute to the high rate of male disciplinary problems in school. Traditional relationships and role expectations between the sexes also place heavy burdens on men, who often are expected to be the sole or major financial support for a family. This pattern has negative consequences for childrearing, as fathers spend relatively little time with their children and are not involved with the emotional aspects of parenting. In general, men's repression of their own emotions results in psychological stress and even in physical illness. Educators have an opportunity to help students of both sexes to free themselves from old notions about sex roles and to expand their concept of femininity and masculinity. A brief list of resources cites an organization, an instructional packet, books, and two film medium sources. (GC)

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Peer report

Project on Equal Education Rights

Number One

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Ties That Bind:

The Price of Pursuing the Male Mystique

Imagine a world where

- a man not only worked to support his children but had time to know them well as people;
- a man felt comfortable expressing a full range of human emotions — doubt, need, and grief among them;
- a man could live out his natural life span, free of the threat of early heart attacks and ulcers.

Maybe you already live in that world. If so, count yourself lucky. Lots of people don't.

And many boys and young men today are preparing to lock themselves out, too. They're already pursuing the "male mystique," the old notion that a man must be a successful earner first and a person second — a tough and unemotional person at that. Bound and gagged, some men call it.

The women's movement has shown how out-dated assumptions about women block their freedom to achieve and stunt their earning power.

There's a flip side to that coin.

Traditional stereotypes exact a toll from men, too. Understanding the price they've paid can help us give kids the freedom to live in that happier, not-quite-imaginary world.

Ties That Bind launches PEER's new series of occasional papers on significant sex-equity-in-education issues. PEER is a project of the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund. Created in 1974, the project has received support from a number of foundations, including the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and the Rockefeller Family Fund.

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Boys in a Bind, at Home and in School

Growing up male in our society can be tough. Boys learn that it's not enough just to be themselves — that they must somehow *prove* they are full-fledged males.

The cardinal rule for boys is "don't be like a girl." Boys find that certain natural *human* experiences — nurturing others, being aesthetic, sensual, emotional — are taboo, because society labels them "feminine."

Boys may be taught harshly and impatiently to conform to society's expectations of their sex. While parents may view their "tomboy" daughter with tolerance and affection, nobody wants a "sissy" son.

A boy's deepest emotional ties may be with women. After all, women — mothers, grandmothers, preschool and elementary teachers — raise the children in this country. The demand that he be nothing like the adults he feels closest to can trigger tremendous conflict inside a boy. Studies show a high level of anxiety in very "masculine" boys who try to do away with everything "female" in themselves.[1]

If he can't be like girls and women, who can a boy safely emulate? Since fathers traditionally aren't home much, most boys can't learn "to be a man" by spending a lot of time with one. They may fill the vacuum with distorted information from peers and older boys and from media images — John Wayne, Superman, the "Hulk" — that could make *anyone* feel like a failure.

The traditional "masculine" ideal may put up a stumbling block for young boys in school. Many boys come to view quiet activities, like reading, as "feminine," and therefore not something at which boys should excel. Research suggests that the need to prove his "masculinity" may push a boy into academic problems in elementary school.[2]

- For every girl with academic problems in elementary school, there are four boys.
- Two-thirds of grade repeaters are boys.
- In elementary remedial reading, boys outnumber girls two to one.[3]

Messages that equate manhood with toughness and a refusal to compromise may contribute to the high rate of male disciplinary problems in school, and the harsh discipline deemed appropriate for boys may breed even harsher behavior.[4] "A kid at my school was hung up on being a tough guy," recalls one educator. "He loved the Fonzie image. He would rebel at any authority. 'Look at me, I'm so cool,' doesn't improve a kid's learning ability."

The Athletics Connection

> *Except for war, there is nothing in American life — nothing — which trains a boy better for life than football.*[5]
>
> —Robert F. Kennedy

Americans traditionally view competitive sports as a big part of a boy's preparation for a man's life. Athletics have become another proving ground for masculinity, producing a tidal wave of pressure on boys to play sports and, above all, to *win*.

For many, that pressure may drown out the genuine benefits of athletic competition. If a boy can't "make it" as an athlete, he is likely to feel inadequate. He may quit, and lose out on the real pleasures of sports — the exhilaration of exercising full out and keeping fit, the fun and comraderie of teamwork. Or he may keep trying, setting standards that have nothing to do with what he really wants or enjoys.[6]

Men and Women

Traditional relationships between the sexes often put different burdens on men and women. In the dating game, the male has been expected to play the aggressor, bravely facing down the possibility of rejection. To call Mary, and then Sue, for a Saturday night date, he may need an armor-plated ego. And the old rules deny him the pleasure of being asked out himself.

When traditional role expectations rear their heads in marriage, many men feel trapped, pressured, not free to be themselves. "I'm supposed to know about the cars, to know what every little rattle is," says one man. "But I don't know that and I don't really *want* to know that. That's not in my job description."

The old system ties "manhood" to "money." A "real man" is expected to bring home all the bacon his family needs, all by himself. But what if his income isn't enough? What if his wife *wants* a paid job? "I fought it tooth and nail when Ruth looked for a job," one man reports. "We needed the money, and she was determined. But I felt somehow inadequate as a man." More than one marriage has foundered on those rocks.

Winning Bread

Men work. The two words fit hand in glove in most people's minds. And, too often, it's not enough just to work — a man must move "up." "It was difficult for me to go into and stay in elementary teaching," says one educator. "People say, 'Is that all you want to do?' They assume that male teachers want to be administrators."

Sometimes, no matter what a man does, it seems he can't win. An ambitious man who puts in long hours may find that his family resents him for being away from home so much. Yet if he gives his job less prominence in his life, he may feel and may be looked upon as "lazy" or less masculine. "Any man who not only says he wishes he could spend more time with his children, but actually does so, is suspected by his associates of not being properly ambitious."[7]

Under the traditional rules of the game, men have little option of staying home. There is "no set of beliefs that allows men to value themselves without regard to the marketplace."[8] If a man loses or quits his job, it can be psychologically, as well as financially, devastating. As one man puts it, "My father firmly believes that a man without a job is nothing." Not just hungry, but *nothing*.

Shouldn't a man feel valuable — quite apart from his paycheck?

Fathers

> *My father worked hard to support us. He'd come home tired, fed-up. My mother did the child rearing. But I needed a* daddy. *I needed* him. *He'll never know how much.*

Many men want to be closer to their children, but the old assumption that mother means "mommy" and father means "bread-winner" can set up barriers between dads and their kids.

First, the sheer amount of time many fathers must spend at work exacts a toll, in hours and in energy, that may not leave much for daughters and sons.

Perhaps even more damaging is the rigidity built into the male mystique, the discomfort many men feel in the nurturing role because they've been told it's not manly. And the gap between father and his children may continue into adulthood. "The closest I come to my father is a handshake," says one man.

When daddy participates in child rearing, it's often in the role of the "heavy." "On everyday things, my mother set down the rules," says another man. "But when it was a crisis or 'somebody's gonna give you spanking,' it was always my dad." "Just wait 'til your father gets home . . ." is an all-too-familiar refrain.

Men in Hiding

> *When a man's self is hidden from everybody else . . . it seems also to become much hidden even from himself, and it permits disease and death to gnaw into his substance without his clear knowledge.*[9]
>
> —Sidney Jourard

The mark of the male mystique is the refusal to indulge one's pain, either physical or emotional. A man learns to keep himself hidden. But he may pay a price for his facade of strength.

Many men learn to ignore their bodies' distress signals, until those signals refuse to be ignored. "Because it's weak to admit you're sick," says one man, "I drag myself to work when I've got the flu." Since men resist treatment during earlier stages of illness, when they do end up in the hospital, they tend to stay an average of 15 percent longer than women do.[10] And men die eight years before women do, on the average.[11]

Little boys, trying to measure up to "ideal" images of unemotional men, may find themselves boxed in. "I wanted to be a mountain man as a kid," one man reports, "tough, gritty, able to withstand any adversity. But I was just tough. I couldn't talk." Isolation is the mountain man's middle name.

A boy learns not to ask for help when he needs it; later, a man may "take to the hills" when he's troubled, to work it out alone. It doesn't always work. One father said his son had often hiked the Appalachian Trail when he felt bad. Two days earlier campers had found the young man's body in a small mountain tent. He'd shot himself.[12]

Suicide statistics dramatize what may be the ultimate price of the male mystique. While four times as many women as men attempt suicide, men actually kill themselves nearly three times more often than women do.[13] Among women, suicide attempts may often be a last-ditch cry for help. Women tend to use milder means in their suicide attempts, preferring pills, say, to guns or hanging. It may be that men, forbidden to ask for help, dare not bungle their suicide. They dare not *fail*, even at self destruction.

> ***Believe it or not*** . . .
>
> One little maxim, "big boys don't cry," may imperil the health of millions of men.
>
> Researcher William H. Frey has reported finding a stress-related biochemical in tears of anguish that is absent in other tears, such as those caused by eye irritation. Social pressures on American men not to cry may harm their health, says Frey, by making them retain stress-related biochemicals.
>
> Peptic ulcers, more common in men than in women, are among the diseases which Frey says may be aggravated by the suppression of tears.[14]

Breaking Away

Educators have a tremendous opportunity to help students of both sexes expand their concept of what it means to be a man, what it means to be a woman. Women's struggle to break out of old expectations offers men a chance to break free, too. But many boys are blind to their new opportunity. One father puts it this way:

> *My son is a macho weight lifter, a wrestler. He feels a woman's place is to be at home, to look after him. He's so obnoxious about it. 'That's women's work, not men's work,' he says. In these modern days and times, some gal's gonna have to love him an awful batch to put up with him until he gets himself together. She really is. Otherwise, she'll choke him to death.*

Schools can help students grow in their understanding of the world in which they'll work, marry and raise a family. Boys of all ages need permission and encouragement to learn about being a parent, to feel comfortable nurturing children. They need to know that the previously lonely burdens of breadwinning and housekeeping will be shared responsibilities in many households.

Students need to know about new kinds of partnerships between women and men. One teacher works full-time while her husband spends most of his days at home, writing. "His family and his father's old army buddies bug him about it," the woman reports. "Our landlady

makes cracks. 'When will you start acting like a man?' they ask. But he shrugs it off. *He's doing what he really wants to do.* And I like working a regular job."

Educators in many districts are working to free students from old notions about sex roles. They're

- training staff on issues of sex bias and sex equity;
- examining, replacing and supplementing biased materials;
- sparking student discussion on changing sex roles;
- encouraging students to consider a broader range of classroom and career options;
- supporting "pioneer" students who take a chance on fields of study that are new for their sex.

Parents and community groups are getting in on the act, too. They're

- forming coalitions of local groups concerned about sex equity in school;
- reviewing biased materials and suggesting alternatives;
- interviewing staff and students for their perspective on sex equity in school;
- collecting data on enrollments in traditionally single-sex classes;
- reporting to the community on progress and problems.

School and community efforts are bearing fruit. One junior high principal had worried about trying coed physical education with 13-year-old boys. Many of them were self-conscious about their athletic ability, and the principal feared they'd resist "performing" in front of girls. But the students' reaction surprised him. "It seems they could release a lot of worry, tension and self consciousness because they were together in an easy and relaxed situation," he reports. "The integration of . . . P.E. and . . . industrial arts has made for a healthier atmosphere. *Children are not playing a role anymore.*"[15]

That's all anyone could hope for.

Notes

1 Hartley, Ruth E., "Sex Role Pressures and the Socialization of the Male Child," *Psychological Reports*, Vol. 5, 1959, pp. 457-468.
2 Pogrebin, Letty Cottin, *Growing Up Free: Raising Your Child in the 80's* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), pp. 55-56.
3 Vroegh, Karen, "Sex of Teacher and Academic Achievement: A Review of Research," *Elementary School Journal*, April, 1976, pp. 389-405.
4 Smith, Amanda, et al, *New Pioneers: The North Carolina Program to Expand Sex Roles Through Elementary and Secondary Education. Seminar Leader's Handbook* (Raleigh, N.C.: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1978), p. 61.
5 Clinch, Nancy Gager, *The Kennedy Neurosis* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1973), p. 266.
6 Fasteau, Marc Feigen, *The Male Machine* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), p. 105.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 92.
8 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
9 Jourard, Sidney, *The Transparent Self* (revised edition) (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1971), p. 40.
10 Goldberg, Herb, *The Hazards of Being Male: Surviving the Myth of Masculine Privilege* (New York: Nash Publishing, 1976; Signet, 1977), p. 177.
11 U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, National Center for Health Statistics, *Monthly Vital Statistics Report: Final Mortality Statistics, 1977*, May 11, 1979, p. 2.
12 "Body of Va. Man is Found on Trail," *Washington Post*, April 24, 1980, p. C20.
13 Goldberg, Herb, *The New Male: From Self-Destruction to Self-Care* (New York: William Morrow, 1979), p. 61.
14 Frey, W.H., "Not So-Idle Tears," *Psychology Today*, Vol. 13, January, 1980, pp. 91-92.
15 Blaufarb, Marjorie and John Ganoe, *Title IX Sex Integrated Programs That Work* (Washington, D.C.: American Alliance for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, 1978), p. 4.

Resources for Change

American Man: Tradition and Change, Parts I and II. 1976. Two 10-minute color filmstrips for secondary students and adults, with a teacher's guide. Part I focuses on the limitations of the male stereotype: Part II, on alternatives. Good discussion starters. Butterick Publishers, P.O. Box 1914, Altoona, Pa. 16603. Toll Free (800) 458-3763. $65 for the set (purchase only).

As Boys Become Men: Learning New Male Roles. Doug Thompson. 1980. An informal packet of classroom activities for K-12 students, primarily aimed at the secondary level. Explores old and new male roles. Institute for Equality in Education, University of Colorado at Denver, 1050 9th St., Denver, Colorado 80202. $2.50.

Being a Man: A Unit of Instructional Activities on Male Role Stereotyping. David Sadker. 1977. For junior high students. Explores the stereotype and its price, starting with "Lesson One: Stifle It." Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Stock #017-080-01777-6. $3.75, prepaid.

Growing Up Free: Raising Your Child in the 80's. Letty Cottin Pogrebin. 1980. Explores the development of sex roles in school, in society, and within the family, and suggests ways parents can raise their children free of sex bias. McGraw-Hill Book Co., Order Dept., Princetown Rd., Highstown, N.J. 08520. $15.95.

A Man's Place. 1979. This 30-minute, 16 mm. color film is a good-natured eye-opener for junior and senior high students. Shows people with traditional notions and men who are trying new roles at work and at home. Institute for Research and Development in Occupational Education, City University of New York, 33 West 42nd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10036. Rental $50, Sale $400.

The New Male: From Self-Destruction to Self-Care. Herb Goldberg. 1979. Hard-hitting but hopeful, this book explores the price of the male stereotype and suggest paths for individual growth. William Morrow and Co., Order Dept., 105 Madison Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10016. $10.95.

Sex Desegregation Assistance Centers offer free help to school districts in implementing sex-fair education programs. Each of the 10 centers covers several states. For a list, write Director, Division of Technical Assistance, Equal Educational Opportunity Programs, U.S. Department of Education, Room 2031 - FOB 6, 400 Maryland Ave., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20202.

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